

human

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by [iaintinapatientphase](#)

Summary

“And Lot's wife, of course, was told not to look back where all those people and their homes had been. But she did look back, and I love her for that, because it was so human.”
- Kurt Vonnegut

Eliza, after the Reynolds Pamphlet.

Notes

it is here! pain, part two. although these can be read independently. eliza's is much more introspective than ham's.

things from 'sometimes': i aged up william a bit, and turned peggy's illness into cancer. if you're reading "what we know," first of all thank you! second, this is a standalone that fits nebulously with that universe, making eliza a psych major that does development/fundraising at an orphanage.

new things: my a. ham is bipolar. he's been on meds for many years, considers it just another part of himself, hates talking about it bc he's so sure he has it under control. "stevie" is peggy's hot older sugar mama who will soon be featured in 'what we know.' i love her so much.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

“And Lot's wife, of course, was told not to look back where all those people and their homes had been. But she did look back, and I love her for that, because it was so human.”

- Kurt Vonnegut

Eliza always understood, on an intellectual level, why Alexander couldn't ignore his critics. She imagined it must be maddening to have people that have never met you write diatribes about your supposed immorality or stupidity, but she never understood why he let people who were so clearly wrong get to him so much.

Now she does.

It only takes a few hours after Alexander publishes his confession for the media to get bored of the scandalous details. After a day, they even stop running the clip of Jefferson saying smugly, “he'll never be president now.”

They turn to her.

She starts seeing cameras wherever she goes. When she looks good, she's sad, perfect Eliza, looking teary eyed and angelic in above long articles asking how could cruel, evil Alexander Hamilton possibly do this to his poor, pathetic wife? They get fake outraged captions: *How could he do this to her? His poor wife. After she gave him six children, he cheats on her with some barely legal whore?*

When she looks tired, or upset, or like a human being, they put Maria Reynolds's perfectly posed Instagrams next to her and shrug their shoulders. *Only married her for her money! Bored after twenty years of marriage. Wasn't getting it at home!* Of course he cheated, look at his old, used up wife who only cares about the kids and hates him for working too much.

She reads the comments, seventeen years worth of her own voice yelling at him not to ringing in her ears. No matter what role they cast her in, whether she's too good for him or way below his league, MILF or hag, she's always the pathetic, blind, unwanted wife.

“No, it's not made of corn,” Alex Jr. says. “We went over this last year.”

“Then why is it called ‘cornucopia?’” Virginie asks frustratedly. “America, explain!”

“No yelling,” Henriette, oldest of the Lafayette/Hamilton kids chides. “Baby William is sleeping.”

“America's a little busy setting the table,” Philip says dryly, not looking up from the chessboard. “Ask him at dinner.”

“Cornucopia is a stupid word.”

“It is Latin, Virginie,” her older brother Georges says, moving his rook deliberately.

“Latin is stupid,” she amends. All the Hamilton children nod in agreement, scarred by one too many listens to the Latin “Baby Einstein” CD.

Angelica finally puts down her latest trashy novel borrowed from her aunt. “Philip, did you just

call the president ‘America?’”

“Symbolism,” he answers absently.

Georges snorts.

“Okay, namesake, I don’t know why you’re laughing when you guys literally call him ‘grand-general,’” Angelica says.

“Our dad is weird, okay? He thought it would be funny to combine ‘general’ and ‘grand-pere.’”

“Your dad still calls him ‘Mr. President,’ even though there is now President Adams,” Anastasie adds.

“We’re a new country, cut us some slack while we figure it out.” Philip knocks another one of Georges’s pawns off the board and pumps an obnoxious fist.

Virginie sighs and turns back to Alex. “And what is to cut slack?”

Eliza smiles to herself and goes back to the kitchen. “The kids are fine,” she tells Adrienne.

“*Bien*,” she says, grabbing one of Martha’s serving platters from on top of the fridge. “They have always been so friendly to each other, but now they are all becoming teenagers, so I worry. Mine, at least. You still have your sweet younger boys.”

“I do,” Eliza says, looking over to Jamie and little John following Washington around the table, carefully laying napkins at each place and enraptured by some story he’s telling them. Her sweet, serious, quiet boys, more like her than the older three. “As for the others, If they’re anything like their fathers-” she stops herself abruptly. She forgot, for a moment. She keeps doing that. It’s jarring.

Adrienne doesn’t notice, but glances into the dining room where Lafayette and Alexander have stopped even pretending that they’re helping and are instead bickering loudly about something they’re reading on Lafayette’s phone.

Eliza hadn’t wanted to come today, not even three months after the affair came to light. Didn’t want to spend an entire day with Alexander’s best friend and pseudo family when she and her husband barely even speak. But they spend every Thanksgiving at the Washingtons’, joined by Lafayette - the most American Frenchman there ever was, always eager to celebrate their new holidays - and his family, and she thought it might be weirder to not. Besides, Angelica’s still in England, Peggy with Stevie’s family, and Eliza can’t imagine anything more awkward than a meal with Alexander, the kids, and her father that hasn’t forgiven him even a little.

So. Mount Vernon it is.

It’s easier than she expected. She and Alexander have gotten pretty good at dancing around each other and the younger Lafayettes are almost as loud as their own children and provide plenty of distractions.

When they finally sit down to dinner, she and Alexander are on opposite ends of the table, on the same side so there’s not even the slightest chance that they have to see each other. It helps, for a minute, until they finish saying grace and he starts talking again.

He is so *fucking* loud. Like always, though she never really realized when she wasn’t actively trying to forget he was sitting at the other end of the table. So loud, so obnoxious; always talking

over other people, insisting that he's right, even when that other person is the former President of the United States. Philip's old enough to join in now, to Alexander's endless delight, and Angelica's never let age stop her before. The Lafayettes hop in, despite the fact that none of them really understand how American government works, and soon half the table is arguing loudly about whether James Madison can beat the primary challenger Alexander is supporting out of some quest for petty revenge.

She suddenly feels overcome with it all, heart pounding in her ears and her breath catching in her throat. She waits for another loud burst of laughter and takes the opportunity to slip out, bolting for the kitchen.

She leans against the counter, heels of her hands pressed into her eyes.

"Eliza, are you alright?"

She jolts upright. Washington is standing a careful, polite few feet away from her, looking at her with concern.

"I'm fine! I was just getting another bottle of wine," she lies. She waves a hand at the wine cooler, very obviously on the opposite side of the island and very not what she was looking for.

He gives her a pointed look.

"I was," she insists. "It's a nice wine cooler, by the way, though I shouldn't have been surprised. Martha has such lovely taste. It's so nice of you both to invite us here every year. I'm sure you value peace and quiet after everything, and the kids are so loud, he's so loud, everything is just so loud sometimes, and-"

"Eliza. It's okay if you need a break." He does that warm but stern father of a nation thing so well that she's pretty sure he could tell her to get polygamy-married to James fucking Monroe, that marriage ruining motherfucker, and she would do it. She wonders idly if he (or Alexander, even) know that when Monroe called her to apologize last month she told him to go fuck himself.

She takes a deep breath. "Okay."

He waits.

"Has he talked to you at all? About everything?" she asks hesitantly. She's not sure if she wants to know either way.

"No."

"Oh." She looks down and picks at her nails.

"I'm sorry."

"No, it's okay. I don't know if that's the answer I wanted or not."

He clears his throat softly and she looks up. "Do you mind opening this? There's a corkscrew in the drawer to your left."

She nods, takes the bottle from him, and starts peeling the wrapping off the neck.

"He's never talked to me about personal things," Washington says. "But he's not especially challenging to read. He's been struggling, emailing me at even more erratic hours than usual. He's

not taking care of himself.”

“He forgot to pick up his meds last month,” she says quietly, carefully lining up the bottle. “They called me and said he was going to run out in two days if he didn’t refill his prescription, so I went and got them. He’s been taking them, thank God, but...” She doesn’t finish, doesn’t want to imagine what might have happened if he had to deal with a low swing in his emotional state, or if he went manic instead and tried to throw himself even harder into his work.

“I wish I could do more for him, or that I had at least known. I could have helped.”

“It’s not your fault he’s self destructive,” she sighs. “It’s been difficult. Watching him struggle. But I can’t help him, I just can’t.”

“It’s okay. None of this is your fault or responsibility,” Washington says gently. “How are you feeling? Only if you’re comfortable talking about it, of course.”

She turns the corkscrew slowly. “I’m furious with him. He was supposed to be so special, and he did this. The most cliché, ordinary thing possible.”

Washington waits, patiently, and she focuses intently on working the cork out of the bottle.

“His first instinct was to protect his career. Not to call me, to warn me or to see if we could figure something out together. Instead he writes some insane, paranoid essay defending himself.” She shrugs. “I thought that things were different. Better. You remember what he was like when he was younger. I thought that after twenty years together, maybe... I don’t know. But he made it clear he doesn’t value what we have, not just by sleeping with her but by not even thinking to come to me when it got bad. I would have still been mad, obviously, but it would have meant something.”

She turns the loose cork over and over and over in her hands. “Even now, he doesn’t talk to me. He doesn’t look at me. He does his best to act like I don’t exist at all. Which is sometimes what I want, when I can’t see him without thinking about it. But I still want him, I still want to have a husband and someone to talk to and to share things with. He took that away from me.”

She looks up and Washington is still watching her, silent and unreadable.

“It’s okay if you take his side. I know he’s an asshole but he loves you,” she tells him. “I have my sisters and friends and the whole world on my team, apparently. No one really knows him anymore except you and Lafayette and Hercules. And he barely sees them.”

He shakes his head. “I’m not here to take sides. He was wrong. You’re both very hurt by it. It’ll take time.”

“Yeah,” she says. “I guess.”

He looks at her again, and she can feel herself being examined. Whatever he sees must be good, because he jerks his chin back towards their still yelling families. “Shall we?”

She nods. He kindly pretends to not see her take a deep breath and square her shoulders before they go back into the dining room.

A package arrives for her Saturday morning: a silver wine cooler and four bottles of wine.

For when you need time. Be kind to yourself.

Fall turns into winter; the baby starts holding his head up and she starts going back to work twice a week. At first she thinks it's the stress making her irritable, but work is so much easier than home these days. At the orphanage, there's problems she actually knows how to solve. She goes back to using the treadmill a few times a week (okay, twice at most) in an effort to relax a little.

She's been frustrated, stiff, irritable for two weeks before she realizes what it is.

She's not surprised, when she puts it together. She and Alexander stopped having sex early last summer when her stomach got too far in the way, and obviously never picked back up again.

She lets herself pout a little, annoyed that her once great sex life has now devolved to this: her trying to find twenty minutes where she's not overrun by children, work, or thoughts of her husband's betrayal and infidelity to grind out an orgasm. Eliza knows that it wasn't just sex that sent Alexander to Maria Reynolds's bed. It's been consistently incredible since they met, save for a brief period after Philip was born and Alexander was too scared to do anything but "make love" to the "mother of his child." It was as sweet as it was irritating, but she coaxed him out of it quickly enough and he went happily back to staring at her chest in public and trying to desecrate every flat surface in their house.

She finds the time and decent enough head space eventually, stretching out in bed with a hand between her legs and moving her fingers in small circles, trying to banish memories of being here with Alexander and keep the images in her head generic: a hand here, jawline there, the hot professor who would rest his hand on her leg when she went in for office hours, pushing Alexander into an abandoned office during a state dinner, his hands tangled in her hair, looking up to see the long line of his throat thrown back -

She groans in frustration. She hasn't tried in a while, and if she knew it was going to be this difficult she wouldn't have even bothered. *This is just physical*, she reminds herself. *We don't need to go the whole bodice ripper fantasy route.* Fingers are too personal and take too long, she decides. She rolls over onto her stomach and digs around in the bedside drawer for the vibrator she keeps tucked away, pointedly ignoring the other artifacts of their more adventurous sexual endeavors. She flicks the switch experimentally, hoping against hope the batteries are charged. It buzzes to life in her hand and she flops back over with a sigh of relief, guiding it between her legs and jolting when it hits just the right spot.

There. THAT is what she fucking needs. Her skin begins to heat up and she bites her lip, doing her best to relax into it. She grinds her hips down, and shudders so violently when the tip slides along her clit in exactly the right way that she accidentally bumps the vibrator up three settings. She flinches and immediately turns it down, lower than before, something in her stomach fluttering at the change of sensation.

Alexander was so good at this, the teasing, the build up. He touched her like he had all the time in the world, like there was nothing else that could possibly draw his mind away from her, nothing more pressing than cataloging her reaction to each twist of his fingers. She always shivered under the weight of his full attention. A mind like his, normally pulled in hundreds of different directions, when focused singularly on anything was a terrifying, beautiful thing, and she never stopped feeling a heady mixture of pride and trepidation when it was turned on her. That's what drew her to him in the first place. She saw him, restless eyes bouncing over all the faces in the ballroom, carrying on two conversations at once, and imagined what it might be like to keep all that attention for herself.

She could have it, if she wanted it. Could have him sitting on the edge of the bed, running his fingers delicately up her thighs, letting his gaze linger like another pair of hands. Grabbing the vibrator, telling her with a teasing smile that he needed to rest this round if he was going to make her come four times that night. Turning it on to the lowest setting, like she did now, working it in small circles around her, everywhere but where she wanted it.

“Is this what you want?” he would ask lazily, sliding two fingers slowly into her, letting the vibrator rest just below her clit. She’s shaking with effort not to move, not to shift her hips enough to get the vibration where she needs it or grind down onto her fingers, drawing out the game only she’s playing. He would curl his fingers, making her arch her back and cry out. “Is it, Eliza?” No one said her name the way he did, obscenely, tongue tripping over it like another part of her body.

“No,” she hisses to the empty room, imagining the gleam in his eyes as he would flick to the next setting and hold it to her clit for a few seconds before yanking it away.

“I thought you didn’t want that,” he’d say with that infuriating grin of his as she groaned. “Must have made a mistake.”

“I want,” she chokes, pressing herself fully against the vibrator again. “You-”

“What?” he would cut her off, annoyingly smug. “Eliza, I’m right here.”

“Shut up,” she says, sounding breathy instead of annoyed.

He’d only laugh in response, turning the vibrator up another notch. He’d slide his fingers, still slick from being inside her, along her lip where she was biting it, tugging it gently loose from her teeth and pushing his fingers gently inside. She sucks on them (hers) greedily, biting down when the vibrator kicks up again.

“What is it that you want?” Sliding wet fingers down her chest, blowing cool air over the trails he would leave, making her shiver.

“I want you,” she manages. She’s surprised by how much she means it.

“Ah, I see. Do you want me to fuck you?” he’d say, voice slipping deeper. She can hear it so vividly. She nods wildly. “Aloud, Eliza.”

“Yes, Alexander, I want you to fuck me, I need you to, please just fucking do it,” she begs, the vibrations flooding every nerve in her body and making it hard to focus. She misses the hand he would cup gently around her chin, locking her eyes with his and grounding her in the moment.

He’d smile again, mixing the filthy with the tender in that way that only he could do. “I will, beautiful, but-”

“But. What?” she grits out.

“But first,” he’d say, endlessly patient and entirely unruffled, pushing the vibrator to the highest setting, “you’re going to come for me like this. Now.”

On cue, she shatters, pulled under by the waves of pleasure wracking her entire body, biting down on her lip and free hand grabbing onto her own hip like a lifeline.

She comes to and flicks off the vibrator, leaving her sweat soaked, alone, and only partially satisfied in the silent and empty room.

They're trying, desperately, to keep it together for the kids. It doesn't work as well as she'd hoped. She knows the oldest three have read Alexander's stupid confession, and Jamie and Johnny clearly know something's up, even if they don't ask directly. William, alone, doesn't know what it was like before, doesn't make her fear she's a bad mother for disrupting the family balance. She relishes his soon-to-disappear clinginess, holding him on her lap while they eat breakfast and breathing in the warm baby scent of his head.

“Are you done with that yet?”

She and Alexander both look up simultaneously.

Angelica raises her eyebrows. “Dad? The front page?” She gestures exasperatedly to the newspaper spread out before him.

“Just a second, angel,” he says with a tired, faint smile.

Something in her twists, seeing the glow in his eyes. He's a wonderful father, busy but never absent. He's called their Angelica “angel” since the day she was born, starting as a way to tell the baby and her aunt apart, doubling as a joke meant to needle Angelica the elder. Eliza wonders if the children notice the way his voice slips into something softer, lighter, around the “A” and the “G.” He does it with the others, too. Sometimes, when he's tired or thinks no one notices, he calls Alex “Alexandre,” mimicking how his own mother must have said his name. She wonders if they know just how much they mean to him, her poor abandoned husband whose father and only brother ignore his emails.

They don't, of course, nor could they. Happy children take their parents for granted, which is its own blessing.

He finally looks up from whatever article he's reading and folds it as carefully as he can before handing it to Angelica, who barely looks up, muttering a “thank you” through a mouthful of cereal. His dark eyes linger on her, impossibly tender.

A wave of longing hits Eliza in the chest so hard she can't breathe. He's spent the last few months dancing around her, flinching away from the slightest brush of her hand, avoiding even looking at her. She misses it, she misses him, the way with a single look or word or touch he could center her, restore the balance in her head, make her feel like everything would be okay.

She's angry again, suddenly. Who's fault is it that she can't have him? His, she wants to say, his fault for cheating on her and telling the whole world and making them all think she's weak and blind and stupid. But she knows, deep down, that if she wants him back all she needs to do is say the word.

She can't.

Eliza lets herself in the door, drunk and giddy and feeling sixteen again. Peggy's out of the hospital and it's still thrilling to have Angelica here in the flesh and not only on her computer screen. She feels like a champagne bubble, so light she could fly away.

She tiptoes as quietly as she can up the stairs, thankful that the kids are long asleep and wouldn't notice even if she smashed one of the bottles she finished in the hallway. She idly considers it, just to watch the pretty green glass make patterns on the carpet, the leftover champagne sinking into

the fabric and making it smell sweet for days. She decides against it. She doesn't want the baby to cut himself.

And there's her Alexander, her husband, wearing the sweater she bought him for their fourth Christmas, his golden skin looking so invitingly warm against the green. It's exactly the same color as the bottles earlier, she marvels. It must have been a sign.

"Hi," she says shyly. His eyes are so wide, she should be careful not to scare him. She smiles at him. *It's okay, Alexander. It's only me.*

He smiles back, like the sun coming out from behind the clouds. It makes her chest hurt. "Hi," he whispers. "How are your sisters?"

"They're good," she tells him. They are good. Angelica's home and Peggy was having a good night so Eliza's happy.

"Good," he agrees. He looks happy, too. She almost forgot what that looked like. She wants him to keep being happy. To keep looking at her. She wants to see if his skin is really as warm as it looks, and she steps forward absentmindedly to find out.

He takes a step back. His eyes are wide again.

He shouldn't be nervous. She kisses him, trying to tell him that it's okay. She's here. He doesn't need to be scared anymore.

It works. He sighs into her mouth and pulls her so close all she can feel is his warmth. She thinks for a second her knees might give out, but he grabs on to her hips at exactly the right time and keeps her upright. She forgot how nice this was, to lean on another person. She's been so, so alone for the last few months that being so close to Alexander makes her head spin.

He takes another deep breath, his chest rising and falling like a wave against hers, and all she can think is how she needs to be closer, close enough to erase all the lonely nights, tangled up so tight he can never leave her again. She takes a step backwards, like an experiment, to see if he'll stay with her this time. He does, and she's glad again for his tight grip holding her up.

Suddenly he's gone, lips ripped from hers. He pulls back and she can see that his dark eyes are huge with terror. "Eliza, no," he says shakily.

It's okay. They're together, it's okay, it's right, why can't he see that? "Alexander, yes," she says firmly. She kisses him again, trying to get him to smile. She holds the back of his head, sliding her fingers through his silky soft hair, rubbing her thumb soothingly over the pressure points. His hands stop shaking on her waist, and they move down the hall, his hips pressed firmly against hers.

He pulls his lips away from her again, and she's disappointed before she realizes she needs that space to breathe while he kisses her neck, tongue slipping over a sensitive spot and biting just hard enough to make her shake. Her pulse is thrumming in her skin, screaming *closer, closer, closer*, making any inch of space between them hurt. She tugs on his one side of his shirt lightly and he turns automatically, backing up and sitting on the bed, hands against her hips drawing her forward and up to straddle his lap.

She fits herself tightly against him, one arm wrapped around his shoulders for balance and one holding onto his hair, tilting his head up so she can kiss him at exactly the right angle, the way she knows he likes. She can feel his shoulders working underneath her arm, and feels the corresponding hand movements with a strange sense of voyeurism: around her waist and over her

breasts and down her thighs. He never stops, never settles anywhere. She tugs on his hair, trying to demand that he stop teasing her, stop running away from her, jolting when he bites down on her lip in startled response. She leans into it, the flash of pain grounding her in the moment, and his hand comes up to rest on her back, steadying her.

Then he's gone again, leaving her sitting alone and staring at him and his wide eyes across the room.

"We can't," he says, voice rough and panicky. "You'll regret this in the morning and I- I can't do that to you."

She shakes her head. "No, I won't. I want to," she says. "We haven't had sex in such a long time."

He flushes at that. "It's not a good idea," he says, eyes bouncing all around the room, looking everywhere but at her.

"Please?" she says, trying a pout and the fluttery eyelashes that always make him smile in public and shudder in private. She tries not to hear the pathetic note in her own voice.

Oh, but that makes him angry. His eyes finally stop looking sad and harden instead. "No, Eliza," he says harshly.

She bristles. "Why not? I know you want to." She does. She can see it in the way his fingers twitch, the way he can't stop swallowing down whatever he wants to say. She *felt* it, not two minutes ago.

"Go to sleep," he mumbles, looking down in that way he does when he's lying, or trying to.

It infuriates her.

"Why can't you give me what I want this one time? Is that too much for you?" she demands. "I think I've earned that much."

"Stop," he says, still refusing to lift his head.

"You keep ruining my life, you know," she says dangerously, pushed forward by some dark impulse, hoping against hope if she pushes hard enough she can shock him into looking up at her. "You're the one who cheated and I'm the one who keeps getting punished for it. I haven't had sex in over a year, Alexander. I was super pregnant and now I'm a scorned wife. How is that fair at all? I didn't do anything wrong, and I have to be celibate now."

It doesn't work. He stares sullenly at the floor. "You don't have to be," he says quietly, every word laced with the threat of him leaving.

"Right." She forces herself to laugh, to act like the very possibility is ridiculous and not her worst nightmare. "My options are A. forgive you for cheating on me with a twenty year old and then telling the whole world about it, then try to forget that long enough to have sex with you sober, or B. have sex with someone else, which I can't do, because unlike some people, I meant my marriage vows," she says, hearing her voice rise to a near hysterical pitch when he still won't fucking look at her.

"Fuck you," she tries desperately.

That works, though she can't find it in herself to be pleased with her success. He stares her, picking apart her thoughts, asking her what exactly she thinks she's doing. Asking her why she doesn't just

leave, if they really do make each other this miserable.

Something in him shuts off. "I'm not doing this now, you're drunk," he says, like she's a child throwing a tantrum and he doesn't have the patience.

"Don't patronize me," she says sharply, like a reflex. This part, at least, is familiar. He's always been so high minded and heavy handed, thinking that he knows what everyone around him actually wants, thinking they're too stupid to figure it out for themselves. It's one of the worst parts of him. "I'm sober enough to remember that even if I'm still mad at you, I don't actually hate you and I would like to have sex with my husband for once in our miserable lives."

"You will hate me," he insists, like he didn't even hear her. "I promise, when you wake up in the morning and remember this conversation, you'll hate me. More if I let this go further. I'm not going to hurt you any more."

"Too fucking late," she says. It bursts out of her, raw and hurt and far too honest. He's hurt her already, and he's doing it again. He lied to her, slept with another woman, and now refuses to look at her like she's the one that's a constant reminder of the problems in their marriage.

He's looking at her now, but it's not what she wanted. Not at all.

"I lied," she says. "I hate you sometimes."

He sighs deeply, sounding sad and annoyed and tired and alone all at once. "That's fair."

"Only sometimes," she confesses, far too honestly, and he inhales sharply.

How can she tell him that she still loves him, all the time? How it hurts to see him every day and not touch him? Even when she's angry, when she sees reminders of his mistake that ruined everything, he's the only one she wants to go to for comfort. How can she explain to him that she hates him and loves him, all at once, a dizzying combination that makes her feel sick? How she doesn't know which side of her is right?

She shrugs, helpless to explain. "I don't know what to do with 'sometimes.'"

"Me either," he says, voice thick with something she can't name.

It's too much. She feels overexposed, raw, too - something.

"Get out," she begs, even though she sees the flash of hurt in his face. "Please."

He chooses this, of all moments, as the time to give her what he wants, and leaves her alone without even a final glance.

She hears herself sobbing before she feels the tears on her face, and curls up wondering how such a perfect night ended like this.

He continues to flail, and she continues to watch.

When things were normal, whenever the boys needed a haircut he'd go too. One morning, she notices John's hair hanging in his eyes over breakfast and makes a mental note to ask Alexander to take them that weekend. That afternoon, she sees a commercial for some trashy awards show, with "The Reynolds Pamphlet" in the running for "Scandal of the Year."

She can't look him in the eye after that.

So she takes them herself. At dinner he looks at their small, dark heads like he's never seen them before, absentmindedly fiddling with the binder clip he had so carefully chosen to hold his hair back that day. The next time she sees him the ponytail's gone, the general shittiness of the haircut and the pair of scissors she finds in the bathroom confirming her suspicions that he did it himself.

She's always liked his hair long, always liked threading her fingers through it, braiding it when he sits still long enough, gripping it while he turns her slowly, methodically into a shaking mess. It gives her a thrill of strange nostalgia for a girlhood spent sharing pillows with her sisters and doing hair for school dances. Alexander's hair is so different than Angelica's riot of curls or Peggy's endless waves. It's silky, pathologically straight. Not unlike her own, which sometimes gives her a strange sense of self-awareness when she's running her fingers through it.

He looks even more ridiculous than usual, trying to keep his hair out of his face. It's not long enough at present to tie back with any of the random office supplies he finds or a rare actual hair tie, so he's constantly shoving it back or just holding it up out of his eyes. The sight of his fingers constantly shoving through his hair makes her uneasy. They're enough alike in coloring that if she wants to, she can imagine his fingers to be her own, or the head to be hers. The thought makes her ache with longing.

She's not sure when he remembers headbands exist, but at some point he steals one of Alex's - a leftover from his soccer playing days, before they steered him and his hot temper into hockey- and starts keeping it double looped around his wrist, looking extremely proud of himself. The kids (Angelica) tease him mercilessly about it: "Hitting the field today?" "You think you're sporty now? You haven't been to the gym in six years." "Do the judges give you a red card when you start yelling too loud in court?"

Philip grows his hair past his shoulders.

"What's wrong with you?" Peggy asks around her straw, a habit she's had since childhood.

Eliza makes a face. "Nothing? I'm just sitting here."

"You're acting weird," Angelica agrees bluntly. "You keep rubbing something on your neck. Is that scarf new? Are you allergic?" She reaches over and grabs the fabric experimentally before Eliza can pull away.

"Oh my god. Peggy, look, she has a hickey," she says, hands pressed against her mouth trying desperately to stifle a laugh.

"Shut the fuck up," Peggy practically yells, dropping her drink and scrambling around the table to get a better look. "Holy shit, it is. Are you thirteen? When were you going to say something?"

"Soon!" She swats Peggy's hand away from her neck. "We've barely been here ten minutes."

"This is not wait until the entree news," Angelica chides. "This is text immediately after news! I'm honestly offended."

"Me too," Peggy agrees. "Anyway. You and Alex are fucking again?"

"Well, kind of. Not exactly. But yes?" she tries. "It was just last night. It was the first time since that other time," she says. They understand immediately, not making her specify "the night that I

drunkenly threw myself at him and he rejected me.”

“It was... nice,” she begins, answering the first of many questions she can see in their faces. “It wasn’t anything in particular that started it. Johnny left his backpack in the kitchen so I went to go hang it up, and Alexander was in the laundry room folding something. And...” she trails off, not sure she can find the words to describe what happened next. “He just looked up? He looked so... like himself. Like before.”

She’s not sure who leaned forward first, or if it even matters. It only took a second before he was kissing her, lips searing hot against hers. It all happened so quickly. She remembers grabbing him and not letting go until it was over and they were falling asleep curled up together.

“And then...?” Peggy prompts, startling her out of her head.

“And then...” she shrugs. “It just happened. It was nice.”

“You guys had make-up sex that was just ‘nice?’” Angelica scoffs. “You don’t have six children with the guy for nothing. Don’t hold back on details now.”

She takes a long sip of her wine, stalling. “It wasn’t make-up sex exactly,” she admits, frowning when Angelica and Peggy’s faces suddenly shift.

“What does that mean?” Peggy prods.

“It means it wasn’t make-up sex, exactly,” she repeats flatly. Eliza hates feeling like someone can see inside her head. Her sisters (and Alexander, her brain adds unhelpfully) are the only people that can, and it makes her skin crawl.

“Oh, Eliza,” Angelica says softly.

“What?” she says irritably. She doesn’t want to think too hard about the details. Last night was like the simplest, easiest kind of homecoming, and bringing thoughts and words and reality into it is ruining it already.

“You still haven’t talked about it.” It isn’t a question.

She looks down at her lap and fidgets with the edges of her napkin. “So?” she says, trying for flippant but only managing feeble.

“You need to talk to him,” Peggy says, chewing on her straw again.

“No, I don’t. Don’t tell me what to do,” she says brattily. “You have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Yes, we do,” Angelica says.

“Like you’re so happily married?” she snaps, regretting it immediately. Angelica only rolls her eyes.

“Jesus, I didn’t know it was this bad,” Peggy mutters. “Eliza, why don’t you try not being a bitch and telling us why you don’t want to talk to him instead.”

“Fine.” She smoothes an imaginary wrinkle on the tablecloth. “Sorry, Gel.”

“It’s okay, babe. Just tell us what’s wrong.”

She focuses very carefully on the pattern of her skirt and imagines telling them she's too scared to talk to him.

It's not that there's any real reason to worry. Alexander is many things, but someone that might hurt her? Absolutely not. They wouldn't assume anything like that. But she is. Terrified.

Not of him, exactly, but of what he might say. He literally argued his way to the top - she knows if she engages with him he'll win. She knows he wants her back, still loves her with that frightening intensity and need he always has, and she's scared to see what that might make him do. In his desperation she doubts he'll listen to her, doubts he'll accept her reservations and fears and still smarting open wounds. She knows he'll throw everything in his arsenal at her, tearing her arguments to shreds and turning her own words against her. She reread the letters he wrote her when they first met, head spinning. She was sure about him the second she set eyes on him, something deep in her clicking into place, telling her that he was meant to be hers. But she reads them over again, as detached as she can manage, and imagines a world where she hesitated, unsure if she would be better off with a nice guy her parents set her up with than the wild eyed, ambitious young colonel. How could she have stood a chance? Even then, rereading them at the lowest point in their relationship, the twists and turns of phrase, the stunning honesty, vivid, painstakingly drawn pictures of what their life could be pulled at something in her heart. Words are his greatest weapon, and she's never been any match for him. It's not malicious, he'd never intentionally make her feel dumb or steamroll her, but he'll do it all the same. She knew it would happen, could see them arguing, see him winning, see her giving in, could see it as clearly as if it had already happened.

They might laugh. "Scared? Of Alex?" she can hear them say. Her sisters find him thoroughly unintimidating, much to his dismay. Peggy, with her sharp tongue and quick wit, always teased him mercilessly. Eliza remembers the first time he was relaxed enough to try a few jabs back, only to be completely demolished. He had pouted, even though he's denied it ever since. Angelica, her brilliant older sister, has always matched him easily. She tries to sympathize, but Eliza's learned from years of growing up with one and being married to another that geniuses really can't understand how someone else's brain might work slower than the speed of their own. Angelica could never understand why she doesn't want to go toe to toe with him.

"If it turns into an argument, he'll win," she tries to explain. "He'll convince me to forgive him."

Their brows furrow, matching expressions of concern Eliza recognizes from her own face.

"You've forgiven him already. You want him back." Peggy says. Not accusingly, not anything. Just fact.

"Yeah," Eliza agrees. "I know. But he doesn't know that."

"Well, I'd guess he knows now," Angelica says, eyes lingering on Eliza's neck.

"That's the problem. I've wanted to tell him for a while now, but now he'll think it's because of last night and that I'm weak for giving in after he showed the slightest sign of wanting me again."

"Alex doesn't think you're weak," Angelica scoffs.

"Well, he will."

"It seems that you do," she says gently.

"I guess. I feel like I shouldn't have let him stay. Like I should have kicked him out. Divorced

him,” she says with difficulty. “But I didn’t want to. I’ve never stopped loving him, even after. Even when I hated him.”

“Of course you didn’t,” Peggy says. “You’re only human.”

“I’m pathetic,” she says harshly. “It’s not I can’t leave. I have a good job and a supportive family and every reason to divorce my cheating husband and I chose not to. Because I still love him, like an idiot.”

Angelica covers Eliza’s hand with one of hers and squeezes gently. “You don’t stop loving someone because they make a mistake.”

“Why are you taking his side?” she demands. “You’re supposed to tell me that I can do better. To leave him, because he obviously doesn’t deserve me. Be supportive, goddamnit.”

“We are being supportive,” Peggy insists. “Why would we tell you to leave him when that’s obviously not what you want or what would be best for you?”

The waiter picks that moment to arrive, and they shut up, only speaking again to thank him politely.

“So I should just forgive him?” she says challengingly, stabbing a few pieces of lettuce with her fork.

Angelica sighs. “Eliza, it’s been a year. You haven’t ‘just forgiven him.’ You love him, he loves you, and you want to be together. Why should you make yourself unhappy just to prove some dumb point? You shouldn’t leave him because you think you should. If you want to leave him, do it. But he’s the one that fucked up. Don’t punish yourself for it.”

“He shouldn’t get to just come back and have everything be like it never happened, that’s not fair,” she says weakly.

Peggy shakes her head. “That’s not what’s happening. It’s been a year and a half of you two not talking, of him losing what little of his mind he had left. He’s not going to forget that anytime soon. But forgiveness means you love the person who wronged you more than you’re mad at him. It seems like that’s the case here.”

“Peg’s right,” Angelica agrees. “He apologized. He won’t do it again. You’ve both suffered enough.”

She looks down at her plate, shoving her food around. “I know that you’re right, and I want you to be right, because that’s how I feel, but I still feel like I should be mad still. Is that dumb?”

“Who gives a shit about what you ‘should’ do? There’s no relationship police that are going to get you in trouble.”

Eliza laughs despite herself. “You guys are my relationship police.”

“Well, I see no reason for arrest here,” Peggy says. “Proceed. With caution.”

“Word,” Angelica agrees. “Anyway, can we discuss where my Philip thinks he’s going for college? Brown. That child needs structure, not an open fucking curriculum.”

Eliza can't decide what to do when she gets home that night. Should she go get him to sleep in their bed with her? Tell him she's not ready tonight but maybe soon? She locks the door in some deranged effort to stop time while she hangs her head upside down off the bed and tries to figure it out.

The door knob moves and she bolts upright. Shit. It's probably just one of the kids, she tells herself.

It isn't.

He has a coffee stain on his shirt. "I, uh, I think I dropped some notes and a business card in here last night."

Right. Of course. It's always fucking work with him. She feels so stupid for thinking that it could have been something more.

"Yeah. I put them on your desk." she says, trying to keep her face from falling.

"Okay. Thanks."

Something shifts in his face, and she lets herself hope that he's going to say something, anything. That it's going to be okay. That he wants to stay, wants to be with her again.

"Is that it?" she prompts, holding her breath.

"Yeah? I guess?" he says blankly.

Is this her only chance? This is how she has to say she forgives him, backed into a corner, risking making his stupid fucking eyes go all little boy lost on her if she can't do it? She grips the door tightly, feeling a sliver of wood dig into her palm. This is too much pressure. They haven't talked about it, not for over a year, and the weight of all those things unsaid grows heavier and harder to bear every day she doesn't just say those words. She can't do it, not now, not with him looking at her like she holds his happiness in her hands and he can't meet her halfway.

"Okay then," she says. "Goodnight."

She slams the door, feeling spiteful, and locks it.

Dear Dr. Schuyler-Hamilton,

We are pleased to inform you that the Woods Foundation has approved your application for...

"Holy shit!" She runs inside before finishing the email.

Alexander stops pacing and looks up from his phone. "What's up?"

"I got it! The Woods grant!"

"For real? Congratulations!"

"I can't believe it! I'm so excited, it's so much money!" She jumps into him, wrapping her arms around his neck. His arms come up around her waist hesitantly at first, but then strong enough to lift her feet off the floor and spin her around while she giggles.

"It is a lot of money, you should be proud," he says into her ear.

"So should you! Your fucking amazing wife just won a million dollars! Tell me I'm amazing," she says giddily, kicking her feet.

His fingers twitch against her sides. "You're amazing," he says.

"Oh my god. A million dollars." She's been working on this for months, pulling every string she had to have with the Woods family, rescheduling her meeting with the executive director four times, staying up for two nights finalizing the application. A million dollars is huge for the orphanage. They can finally redo the kitchen, the gym, expand the dormitories, hire another nighttime counselor. And that's just this year. If they can turn this into an annual award, the possibilities are endless.

"Mom? Dad? We're back safely, no car crashes," Philip yells.

He comes tumbling into the kitchen with Alex, and she jerks away from Alexander, pretending not to see his face fall.

She ruffles Alex's sweaty head. "How was practice?"

"Good. Coach said I'm getting tall enough to get a new stick soon," he says proudly.

"We'll see," she says. Fucking two hundred dollar hockey sticks. They just got him one three months ago. "Thanks for taking him, Philip."

"No problem," he says absently. He flashes her a quick smile, but he keeps his eyes locked on Alexander, who still hasn't spoken and has a weird look on his face.

"Mom, can you make pancakes?" Alex asks. "Philip wouldn't take me to IHOP."

"Philip has a lot of homework to do, and Alex has no money," Philip says.

"Sure. Go shower first," she says, grateful for the distraction. Alex stops glaring at Philip and runs upstairs. "Bring everyone else down with you!" she yells after him.

"So," Philip says, sitting on one of the stools by the island. "How's everything here?" He's using his fake casual tone, pretending to be oblivious. Eliza will never understand how her kids think that they can even begin to fool her or sneak anything by her when she's watched them develop all their tricks.

"Just fine," she says evenly, measuring out pancake mix. "How much homework is 'a lot?'"

"Eh," he shrugs. "Some reading and an essay. Some leftover math from the other night."

"Some reading and an essay and some leftover math you're going to finish before you stay up all night writing again?"

"Ma, come on, I can't help when the inspiration strikes!"

"You need to rest, Pip. And you need to not wake up your sister at midnight to proofread."

"We were so quiet! How do you even know that?" He tries a cajoling smile.

She shakes her head. She's pretty easily charmed, but hiding it is half the battle. "I know everything."

"I guess." He grabs the paper, wrinkled from Alexander's first read, and scans the front page.

"Your mother won a million dollar grant for the orphanage," Alexander says casually.

"No shit?!"

"Language," she and Alexander say in unison. "But yes," she adds. "We did. Just got the email a few minutes ago."

"Mom, that's awesome!" He drops the cool act and comes around the counter to give her a hug.

Her baby boy, once so small she was scared to hold him, tall and strong and trying so hard to take care of her. She gives him a squeeze and pushes him away before she can get emotional. "Thanks," she says softly, smoothing a loose curl out of his face. She has to reach up to do that now. He's taller than her, when did that happen?

"We gotta celebrate! Let's pop bottles!" he whoops.

"You're underage, Philip, no bottles," she says, trying to be stern through her smile.

"Woo! Mom got a million bucks! I should tweet that." He digs in his pockets for a moment, frowning. "Car," he says, and runs back towards the garage.

She very carefully doesn't look at Alexander and turns back to stirring pancake mix, hoping by the time she looks up that he'll have left and she won't have to deal with the awkwardness of remembering.

"Eliza."

"What?" She throws a pan on the stove, bangs loudly around in the cabinet for the cooking spray.

He's silent for a long moment. "Nothing," he finally says. "Congrats again."

When she finally turns around, he's gone.

She suspects for two weeks. This is the seventh (eighth, she remembers with significant pain) time this has happened, she knows the signs.

She throws up in the morning after spending the night at the hospital with Peggy, who tells her to take a test without even opening her eyes. It's positive, though she didn't really doubt it would be.

She goes to see where he's chosen to hide from her this morning, which is unsurprisingly his office.

He looks up, startled, when she knocks lightly on the door.

"Hi," he says, bolting up out of his chair. "How are you? Here, sit." He pulls out one of the chairs across his desk, and she sits down slowly, trying not to show how nauseous she still is.

"Alexander," she says before trailing off and staring at the wall behind his head.

"Yes?" He's so eager it makes her feel guilty.

"I'm pregnant."

His face goes slack with shock, looking wide open and more honest than she's seen in a while. "What? Really?" he asks incredulously.

He's just so *happy* and she wants to be too, so badly, but she can't. She starts crying. Pathetic, intense, ugly sobbing that she can't control and can't talk through.

He pulls her into his arms, letting her lean on him and it's so nice she wishes she wasn't bawling her eyes out and could appreciate it more. She's missed having him to lean on this past year so much it makes her cry harder.

He starts talking; she can feel the vibrations in his chest before she understands what he's saying. "It's okay, Eliza, it's gonna be okay."

She forces herself to sit up. Crying about it won't solve anything. "How can it be okay? How can we have another child when we don't even speak to each other?"

He blinks. "I mean, you can... you don't have to," he sputters, attempting a shrug that looks more like a twitch. "If you don't want to. It's your choice. You can... if that's what you want."

"No, Alexander," she says coldly. That isn't what she wants, not at all. Would he really rather her get an abortion than have another child with her? God, how is she supposed to do this when he doesn't even want to?

He nods frantically, stumbling back and sitting down heavily on the couch. He grips the blanket - the one she picked out special, knowing he falls asleep in here all the time, the softest one she could find - tightly. "Okay. Good. We'll make it work," he says confidently. He even smiles a bit.

"How?" she demands. How is he so casual about this? "We already have six other children we barely know what to do with."

"We'll figure it out," he says easily. "We can do this, we can get past everything and make it work."

She could kill him sometimes, she really could. The way he decides on things, and automatically any other opinion is wrong. "That's not your decision to make."

"We've already made that decision, Eliza, we've been doing our best for the last year and a half. But this is good! A new baby can be a new start for us. We can fix everything." He's so optimistic, so excited that it makes her want to believe him. "If you want to," he adds.

"If I want to?"

He looks at her, surprised, like she's speaking another language. "I'm not going to pressure you into anything, but you already know where I stand. I've spent the last year and a half trying to make up for everything and I know it'll never be enough but we can get past this."

This is what she was afraid of. He's not backing down, and he'll keep pushing and promising her everything will be okay, it'll be fine, they can do it, when she knows that it's not. He's so good at this, framing the argument so he's the one that wants to fix their marriage and she's the frigid bitch wife from the tabloids.

"Why do you get to force me into making that decision? I'm not the one who fucked up," she snaps. "It's not fair," she adds quietly, almost to herself.

"No, it's not, and I'm sorry," he says, voice rising. "But I'm begging you, please, tell me what you

want and I'll give it to you."

"I want this to have never happened! I want to go back to the days where people didn't look at me like I'm a pathetic idiot! I want to have never heard the name Maria Reynolds," she yells, past giving a shit about tipping whatever fragile balance they've found. "I want you back, like before, when I knew that nothing could be that bad if you were there, but it was bad anyway and now I don't know what to do." Her voice breaks, but she forces herself to keep going. "I don't want you to leave. I never did. That's the fucked up thing. But how can I let you stay after what you did?"

"I already stayed, Eliza, it's been a year and a half," he says heavily and painfully and truer than she wants to admit. "When we talked about what we were going to do after... everything, I said I would leave. That I would give you full custody. All you said was that we were going to keep it together for the kids. You had the chance and you didn't want me to leave."

"What was I supposed to do?" Like she could have done that to him. Even now, he looks more upset than she's ever seen him and it breaks her heart all over again. "Destroy the lives of our six children? Ruin your life by taking them away from you? I can't believe you ever thought that I would do that in the first place."

"I didn't, not really," he qualifies. "But I would have let you if that's what you wanted. I'm thankful everyday that you didn't, but sometimes I wish you had."

"What does that mean?" she asks, panicked. He can't leave now, not after she finally decided she wanted him back.

"Then at least I'd know I had nothing left to lose. I can't keep doing this halfway thing we've been doing for the last few months. With you ignoring me for weeks and then acting like nothing's ever been wrong. After we spent the night together and the next day you looked at me like I was nothing to you... I can't do it. I'd rather us not be together at all than sometimes. I know this is a lot and we haven't talked about it in a while but I can't do it anymore."

She feels another flash of guilt. She knows what she's been doing by refusing to deal with her feelings. They hadn't talked about anything real at all for so long, and every day it became harder to break that silence. She knows she's been taking advantage of the fact that he still loves her and is desperate for anything she'll give him while she tries to figure out how she feels.

"I was afraid to talk about it," she confesses. "I was scared that you would convince me to forgive you and I wouldn't have the words to stop you. That's why I almost burned your letters. Why I did burn mine. I didn't want to remember how you got me to fall in love with you."

He frowns. "But--"

"I know." She forgot how nice it felt to have someone instinctively understand what you were trying to say. He hasn't called her on anything in months. "I know that isn't how it happened. But sometimes it was easier to pretend like I didn't have a choice in it. Then I could blame you for tricking me. It was easier to hate you if you were always an asshole, and I needed to hate you for a little while."

"Okay," he says warily.

"I did it on purpose," she forces herself to admit. "After that night. I was so happy, and then I felt guilty for being happy. I didn't feel like I should want you again. I thought it made me weak, like they all said I was."

He shakes his head. "You're not."

She shrugs. "I know," she says. She doesn't, but this isn't the conversation she's trying to have right now. "But that's how I felt. Feel, really. I was cruel, I was really horrible to you, and you didn't deserve that." She tries to force the image of his crestfallen face, his wide, haunted eyes out of her head. "I'm sorry, Alexander."

He shakes his head wildly. "Don't apologize! It's okay."

"It's not. Just because you were wrong first doesn't mean that I wasn't wrong, too. Don't treat me like I'm some child incapable of doing anything wrong," she says frustratedly. "If we're going to get past this, we have to be honest with each other."

"Okay, fine," he says, looking away from her. "That night was the worst, but that wasn't the first time you did something like that. It killed me, every time. Not knowing where I stood with you. Not knowing if when you texted me on a Tuesday if it would be the last time you did that for a week. Not knowing if when or if you would ever love me again. I know I deserved you freezing me out, but it was those moments of us and then nothing that was more painful than if we hadn't had them at all."

She could cry, looking at the stubborn set of his mouth, trying so desperately to keep it together. "I know," she says gently, and reaches out to rest a hand on one of his. "I'm sorry, really. I won't do it anymore."

"I forgive you," he says simply. Is it that easy?

She threads her fingers through his, gripping his hand tightly for strength. "I forgive you, too," she says, and immediately feels lighter than air.

He doesn't like that, immediately tries to jerk away. "No, Eliza, don't. I didn't say that to make you say it back."

She feels a familiar flare of irritation at his insistence on patronizing her, standing up and pacing before she realizes it. "What did I just say about treating me like I can't make my own decisions? I forgive you for the affair," she repeats stubbornly. "I realized I did a few weeks ago, I just couldn't work up the nerve to say it. I don't want to rehash everything that we said and fought over when it all happened. You know how I feel, and you apologized. I always wanted to stay together. For things to be like they used to. I just needed time."

He raises his hands in surrender. "Sorry."

"I forgive you for that, too." It gets easier every time she says it. "Look at us, handling our problems like adults."

"I hate it. I feel like I need to go yell at some people on Twitter for balance," he says dramatically.

She laughs. "So. What are we gonna do?"

"We are going to have, God help us, a seventh child." He tugs on her hand lightly and she settles in his lap, letting herself lean on him. Nothing has ever felt so right. "And they will grow up to be as wonderful as their older siblings."

"I think it's going to be a girl," she says recklessly. She knows it, somehow, even though they can't find out for another few months. "We could use another one of those around here."

His fingers drum softly against her stomach. She wonders if the baby can hear. “No more naming after aunts. I can’t take the double trouble.”

She turns her head and presses a kiss into his temple. God, she missed him so much. “We’re going to be honest with each other,” she says softly. “This is going to be hard and we can’t do it if we’re unintentionally pushing boundaries or whatever.”

“I promise,” he says, lips brushing against her shoulder where her sweater slipped down. “We can do this, Liza. We really can.”

“Of course we can.” As long as he’s with her, she’s sure they can do anything.

She forgave Alexander, long before that day in his office, before they even conceived baby Eliza.

It takes her longer to forgive herself.

She wonders if he would have forgiven her if she had been the one who cheated. She knows how personally her husband of dubious parentage and fractured marriage might take it. She also knows that he’s decided on her, in a way that he hasn’t anyone else. She saw it in his eyes the night they met and knows that he’s placed her in a different spot in his heart than anyone else. She’s “not regular people to him,” as Angelica once put it, and the thought fills her with a sick sense of power she’s not sure she wants. He needs her, badly, and she’s not sure that he could find it in himself to leave her even if she did the worst thing imaginable. He loves her, absolutely, full stop. Love and hate are easy things for him, never mixing with the other and approaching a shade of grey.

Eliza’s always thought love to be a horribly complicated thing, and people even more so. She doesn’t think you can truly love someone unless you hate them a little, just like even the best of us carry the capacity for sin. How can you know someone as well as she knows Alexander, her sisters, and not know all their worst qualities? Alexander is patronizing, Angelica is arrogant, Peggy is indecisive. The children are horrible brats at least once a week. But loving someone means you know the worst in them and choose to see the good. Alexander isn’t just patronizing, he’s a workaholic, he’s a know it all, he’s hypersensitive, arrogant, impulsive, paranoid, stubborn, neurotic, elitist, hot tempered, shouty asshole that buys new tupperware instead of finding the correct lid and refuses to tell her things that bother him like a normal person and instead waits to blow up and runs to her for comfort. She knows all of this, all too well, and loves him anyway. How could she really love him if she didn’t know that he works so hard because he’s scared it’ll all go away, just like everything else?

All of this aside, she still struggles with guilt over how easily she took him back.

She knows why he did it, why he cheated, without him having to explain. She knows his paranoia makes him self destructive. She’s seen the photos of the poor girl and has no trouble understanding why someone would be drawn in and try to help her. Alexander, the abandoned son of a distressed mother, never stood a chance. As for the sex of it all, she’ll never really get over it, but she’s made her peace with it. Monogamy is difficult and people make mistakes.

She can forgive Alexander even if she can’t forget what he did, and that’s okay. She finally realizes she doesn’t need to choose between love and hate. It’s enough, realizing that they’re both human, to forgive herself, too. Two years ago she could have never imagined how easy it turned out to be.

thank you so much for reading! i loved writing this so much, almost as much as i love eliza.

i'm on [tumblr](#), come say hi.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!